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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1592  
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COMUSNAVCENT //  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
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IRAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 007350

FROM AMCONSUL DUBAI

E.O. 12958: DECL: OADR

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SUBJECT: TEHRAN SEES TALEBAN AS U.S. TOOL AGAINST IRAN

11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY: DAVID PEARCE, CONSUL GENERAL  
DUBAI. REASON: 1.6, X6

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SUMMARY  
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12. (C) ABDUL HAQ, A FORMER LEADER OF THE AFGHAN  
COMMANDERS SHURA, SAYS THE TALEBAN HAVE APPROACHED HIM  
ABOUT SERVING AS FOREIGN MINISTER, BUT HE HAS DECLINED.  
HAQ SAID HE WOULD ONLY ACCEPT SUCH A POSITION IN THE  
CONTEXT OF A CREDIBLE MEDIATION WHERE HE COULD HELP  
NUDGE THE TALEBAN IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. HE SAID  
TEHRAN VIEWED THE TALEBAN AS A U.S. TOOL AIMED AT  
DESTABILIZING IRAN. HE ALSO FELT THE CONTINUATION OF  
THE CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN WAS DRIVING IRAN AND SUNNI  
EXTREMISTS INTO EACH OTHER'S ARMS AND IF THIS CONTINUES  
"OUR MAIN EXPORT WILL BE TERRORISM." END SUMMARY.

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A BUSINESS TRIP TO IRAN  
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13. (C) CONSUL GENERAL MET IN BOTH MID AND LATE OCTOBER  
WITH ABDUL HAQ, A FORMER LEADER OF THE AFGHANISTAN  
COMMANDERS' SHURA. HAQ VISITS DUBAI REGULARLY ON  
BUSINESS AND IN LATE OCTOBER HAD JUST RETURNED FROM  
THREE DAYS IN IRAN. THE TRIP FOLLOWED A JUNE VISIT TO  
IRAN AIMED AT NEGOTIATING A FUEL OIL PURCHASE (HE CALLED  
IT "FURNACE OIL") FOR AFGHANISTAN, BUT THE DEAL  
REPORTEDLY FELL THROUGH WHEN THE TALEBAN DEMANDED 50  
PERCENT OF THE SHIPMENT FOR THEIR OWN CONSUMPTION. ON  
THE SECOND TRIP, HAQ HAD SOUGHT TO ARRANGE A COMMERCIAL  
BUY OF 30,000 TONS FOR DELIVERY TO A CUSTOMER IN THE  
UAE. CG QUIZZED HIM AS TO WHETHER THE PRODUCT MIGHT BE  
SMUGGLED IRAQI GASOIL. HAQ REPLIED THAT IT WAS LOW-  
GRADE IRANIAN FUEL OIL, THE BY-PRODUCT OF IRANIAN  
REFINING OPERATIONS, AND NOT THE HIGHER-GRADE IRAQI  
DIESEL OR GASOIL. HE SAID NOTHING HAD COME OF HIS  
DISCUSSIONS IN IRAN BECAUSE IRANIAN MIDDLEMEN HAD WANTED  
TOO MUCH "COMMISSION" TO MAKE THE PROJECT WORTHWHILE.  
THE MIDDLEMEN APPARENTLY ARE AFFILIATED WITH THE BONYAD-  
E MOSTAZAFAN VA JUNBAZAN, IRAN'S FOUNDATION FOR THE  
DEPRIVED AND WAR DISABLED, A MASSIVE STATE HOLDING  
COMPANY THAT CONTROLS CONFISCATED ASSETS OF THE SHAH'S  
REGIME. HAQ SAID HE MIGHT GO TO TURKMENISTAN TO EXPLORE  
POSSIBILITIES THERE.

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TALEBAN PROBE HAQ ON FOREIGN MINISTER'S JOB  
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14. (C) ABDUL HAQ SAID MANY OF HIS LOCAL COMMANDERS NOW  
HELD PROMINENT POSITIONS WITH THE TALEBAN AND THAT HE  
HAD RECEIVED PROBES FROM THE TALEBAN ABOUT ASSUMING A  
HIGH-LEVEL POSITION LIKE FOREIGN MINISTER. HE SAID HE  
WAS NOT INTERESTED, PREFERRING TO STAY IN PRIVATE  
BUSINESS. HE DIDN'T LIKE THE TALEBAN, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED  
HIS SYMPATHIES LAY MORE WITH THEM THAN RABBANI, SAYYAF  
AND MASOOD, WHOM HE TERMED "FUNDAMENTALISTS." AT THE  
SAME TIME, HAQ DID NOT RULE OUT ACCEPTING A POSITION

WITH THE TALEBAN IF IT WERE IN TANDEM WITH A CREDIBLE MEDIATION EFFORT UNDERWAY BY A "DISINTERESTED" THIRD PARTY. (COMMENT: HE SEEMED TO HAVE THE U.S., NOT THE U.N., IN MIND. END COMMENT.) HE SAID HE WOULD CONSIDER STEPPING FORWARD IF HE COULD PLAY A USEFUL ROLE IN NUDGING THE TALEBAN IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FROM THE INSIDE.

15. (C) ABDUL HAQ COMMENTED AT ONE POINT THAT TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE TALEBAN HAD BEEN VERY NEGATIVE -- MASOOD'S GAINS WERE GIVEN MORE ATTENTION THAN TALEBAN GAINS, AND MASOOD SHELLING OF CIVILIAN AREAS WAS GIVEN LESS ATTENTION THAN SIMILAR TALEBAN SHELLING. CG OBSERVED THAT THE TALEBAN HAD EARNED A LOT OF INTERNATIONAL ILL WILL FROM THEIR TREATMENT OF WOMEN AND GROTESQUE PUBLIC MOCKING OF THE BODIES OF NAJIBULLAH AND HIS BROTHER. HAQ ACKNOWLEDGED THIS, SAYING HE HAD MADE SOME EFFORT TO MODERATE TALEBAN POLICIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE REGARDING WOMEN, BUT TO NO AVAIL. HE SAID THE IDEA OF BEING A PUBLIC SPOKESMAN FOR THE TALEBAN WAS ONE OF THE REASONS HE WAS SO RELUCTANT TO TAKE ON A JOB LIKE FOREIGN MINISTER. "I DON'T AGREE WITH THESE THINGS AND I CAN'T DEFEND THEM," HE SAID.

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HAQ SEES IRAN AND SUNNI EXTREMISTS COMING TOGETHER  
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16. (C) COMMENTING ON HIS VISITS TO IRAN, ABDUL HAQ SAID THE IRANIANS HATE THE TALEBAN. HE SAID THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THE TALEBAN ARE NOT MERELY CONTROLLED BY PAKISTAN, BUT ARE PART OF A SINISTER U.S. DESIGN TO DESTABILIZE IRAN. THE REASONING APPEARS TO BE THAT A HARDLINE SUNNI ISLAMIST REGIME IN AFGHANISTAN MIGHT APPEAL TO THE LARGE SUNNI ETHNIC MINORITIES THAT INHABIT IRAN'S PERIPHERY, E.G. IN BALUCHISTAN. HE ALSO SAID THAT, LIKE IT OR NOT, THE U.S. WAS IDENTIFIED WITH THE TALEBAN AMONG AFGHANS. IF THEY WIN, THE U.S. WILL BE SEEN TO GAIN. IF THEY LOSE, IRAN WILL BE SEEN TO HAVE GAINED.

17. (C) ANOTHER THING IRAN DOESN'T LIKE ABOUT THE TALEBAN, HE SAID, IS THAT IT HAS LITTLE PROSPECT OF GAINING SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE OVER THEM. NOTING THAT IRAN HAD BEEN SUPPORTIVE BOTH OF THE RABBANI GOVERNMENT AND THE HAZARA SHIA, HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE CONTINUATION OF THE AFGHAN CONFLICT WAS HAVING THE UNDESIRABLE EFFECT OF DRIVING THE IRANIANS AND SUNNI EXTREMISTS TOGETHER. HE SAID RABBANI, HEKMATYAR ET AL HAD OPENED THE DOOR TO EXTREMISTS LIKE OSAMA BIN LADIN WHO NEED AN UNSTABLE COUNTRY WITH A WEAK GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT BASE OF OPERATIONS. "IF THIS CONTINUES," HE SAID, "OUR MAIN EXPORT WILL BE TERRORISM." HE NOTED THAT THE TALEBAN'S FOCUS WAS ON AFGHANISTAN, BUT IRAN SUPPORTED MASOOD, RABBANI AND SAYYAF, WHO HE SAID HAD LINKS TO SUNNI GROUPS WITH AN EXTERNAL AGENDA. HAQ PREDICTED EXCEEDINGLY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IF THE COUNTRY WERE DIVIDED ALONG ETHNIC PASHTO AND NON-PASHTO, MAINLY TAJIK, LINES. "IT NEVER WAS A PASHTO-TAJIK CONFLICT BEFORE," HE SAID, "BUT IT IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE SO."

18. (C) HE SAID IRAN IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT A PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN COMMERCIAL ALLIANCE COMPETING WITH IRAN FOR ACCESS TO THE MARKETS OF THE CIS. IF THE TALIBAN IS ABLE TO RESTORE STABILITY TO AFGHANISTAN, HAQ EXPLAINED, IMPORTERS TO THE CIS MIGHT SHIP THEIR GOODS THROUGH PAKISTANI PORTS TO LINK WITH ROAD NETWORKS THROUGH AFGHANISTAN, TAKING BUSINESS AWAY FROM THE IRANIAN ROUTE THAT BEGINS AT BANDAR ABBAS.

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RUSSIA: DELIBERATELY SOWING CHAOS  
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19. (C) HAQ SAID HE WAS DISTURBED BY THE IMMEDIACY AND STERNNESS OF THE RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO THE TALEBAN VICTORY AT KABUL, INCLUDING THE CONVENING OF A SECURITY

CONFERENCE OF THE BORDERING CIS STATES. MOSCOW WAS CLEARLY EAGER TO USE THE SITUATION TO SERVE ITS OWN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE CIS, HE SAID. HAQ MAINTAINED THAT AFTER THE SOVIET PULLOUT FROM AFGHANISTAN, MOSCOW HAD CYNICALLY FUNDED OPPOSING TAJIK GROUPS TO SOW CHAOS IN POST-SOVIET AFGHANISTAN AND JUSTIFY CONTINUED RUSSIAN MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER.

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NO ONE CAN WIN, SOME OPPORTUNITY FOR NEGOTIATION  
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¶10. (C) ASKED ABOUT THE FUTURE, ABDUL HAQ CHARACTERIZED THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AS A "GREAT BIG MESS". HOWEVER, THE ONE POSITIVE ELEMENT WAS THAT NO ONE WAS IN A POSITION TO WIN. WHEN ANY GROUP HAS THE ADVANTAGE, IT IS UNWILLING TO NEGOTIATE SERIOUSLY. RIGHT NOW, THE FORCES ARE SOMEWHAT IN BALANCE, WHICH OPENS SOME OPPORTUNITY FOR DISCUSSION. HE SAID THE "FUNDAMENTALISTS" IN PARTICULAR (RABBANI, MASOOD ET AL) ARE UNDER PRESSURE. IT WAS THESE GROUPS WHO HAD BEEN THE PRIME MOVERS IN SCUTTLING PREVIOUS UNITY PLANS, IN BLOCKING THE RETURN OF ZAHIR SHAH, AND IN UNDERMINING VARIOUS U.N. MEDIATION EFFORTS. BUT FACED WITH A CHOICE BETWEEN, FOR EXAMPLE, A UNITY GOVERNMENT UNDER THE MANTLE OF ZAHIR SHAH AND A GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED BY THE TALEBAN, THEY WOULD OPT FOR ZAHIR SHAH. "FOR THEM IT WOULD BE THE LEAST WORST," HE SAID.

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C) DESPITE HAQ'S PESSIMISM ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION TO THE AFGHAN CONFLICT, HE APPEARED HOPEFUL THAT THE U.S. MIGHT STEP UP TO A MORE ACTIVE ROLE. IN SUCH CASE, HE MADE CLEAR, HE AND OTHERS LIKE HIM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY MIGHT BE WILLING TO ALSO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE PART. BUT FOR NOW, HE'LL STICK TO PRIVATE BUSINESS. END COMMENT.

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